



Priority 4:

Enhancing civil society participation in health policymaking

Among its activities and roles, civil society is a watchdog, securing the transparency and democracy of the European policy making process. It is also critical in supporting the most vulnerable in adverse times, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war. It is the EU's responsibility to safeguard inclusive and transparent policymaking processes that provide civil society with a real seat at the table, including in co-creation of policies, programmes and services. To do so systematically, a Civil Society Strategy that will secure adequate and sustainable funding for civil society of all sectors, including through multiannual frameworks for operating grants, is vital.

To ensure health remains a priority on the EU political agenda, civil society actors in the health field needs to play a strong role in EU policymaking. To do so, a Civil Society Strategy ensuring a safe and supportive civic space is necessary, and that CSOs are backed by sustainable funding to allow them to participate.

A Civil Society Strategy for and by civil society

A Civil Society Strategy needs to be developed that encourages civil society participation, and which lays out a series of clear achievable goals.

- The Strategy should outline actions and measures that would support civil society in tackling the barriers they face, at all levels of their governance. The Strategy should **protect civil society** and their democratic role when threatened.
- The Strategy should establish **formal platforms** for CSOs, advocacy groups, patient representatives, marginalised groups representatives and community leaders to participate in health policy discussions, beyond tick-box exercises and consultations foreseen through the Better Regulation process. Such mechanisms for participation should be accessible, transparent, and representative of diverse perspectives.
- The Strategy could open the possibility for the formation of **advisory panels**, composed of civil society representatives, to provide ongoing input on health policies and ensure that the feedback received is considered in the decision-making process.
- The Strategy should also recognise **the role** of health CSOs in generating knowledge and implementing policies (i.e., as service providers).
- This Strategy should be developed in **co-creation** with public health and patients' CSOs and relate to organisations of all sizes and consider all levels of governance.

The need of sustainable funding

CSOs need to be provided with the sustainable means to carry out their public interest roles independently.

- All civil society organisations should be treated in a fair, equal and transparent manner, including and especially when it comes to funding. The European Commission should develop more coherent action to support civil society in **accessing sustainable funding**.
- Sustainable and secure means of participation in policymaking would also allow civil society to **bring the voice of the public** to the table, balancing the interests of commercial actors that more often have the financial means to significantly influence policy. This would support civil society's contribution in consultation exercises foreseen under the Better Regulation agenda and help ensure that health and environmental considerations are paramount elements of it.
- **Operating grants** must be secured and improved to strengthen civil dialogue and representation, including that of citizens, patients, and marginalised groups.
- Specifically, **multi-annual financial frameworks** should be available for European civil society across sectors. This would mean reinstating the multiannual financial framework for the operating grants in the EU4Health programme by the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE). Doing this would correct the imbalance that health civil society organisations are facing and provide them with more certainty and ability to plan their long-term activities, independently.
- Funding and **capacity building** support should be provided to smaller CSOs that have a pivotal European role, but struggle to access funding due to a lack of time and capacity.



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